

VLR-10/16/90 NRHP-12/6/90

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 18). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Airville other names/site number DHR File #36-03

2. Location

street & number State Route 629 city, town Gloucester state Virginia code VA county Gloucester code 073 zip code 23061

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes sub-rows for Contributing and Noncontributing buildings, sites, structures, and objects.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources Date: 29 Oct 1990

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official Date State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: entered in the National Register. determined eligible for the National Register. determined not eligible for the National Register. removed from the National Register. other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

DOMESTIC: Secondary structures

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

DOMESTIC: Secondary structures

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Federal

Greek Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls wood

roof slate

other granite

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Situated on a high ridge in Gloucester County, just off State Route 629, Airville is approached along a meandering, landscaped lane. A number of early outbuildings, which include a dairy, smokehouse, office, lumber house, and icehouse, are located behind the dwelling. Its cultivated fields that sweep away to forest land and the Ware River beyond contribute to its bucolic setting.

The frame house, one room deep, was built in two stages. While the destruction of early Gloucester County records prohibits a firm dating, the earliest section of Airville, with its gambrel-roofed, central-passage plan, appears to have been built in the last half of the eighteenth century. A three-story frame addition located on the northwest end of the house dates from the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In this section, a Greek Revival porch, adorned with fluted-Ionic columns, provides the main access to the house.

An early twentieth-century porch on the opposite end of the house has been enclosed to provide modern kitchen and breakfast room space.

Contributing outbuildings are mentioned above; two modern outbuildings, a carriage house and a barn, are noncontributing. The nominated site contains approximately forty-five acres.

ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Situated on a high ridge in Gloucester County, just off State Route 629, Airville is approached along a meandering landscaped lane. As the house comes into view, the remains of an old road, dotted with cedar trees, can be seen wandering off to the right, skirting the woods toward the fields that lie below. The house itself is not placed on a true north/south axis but instead faces southwest. (For the purposes of clarity, however, directions will be given as if the house were on a true north/south/east/west axis.) It sits on a broad expanse of lawn that falls away to the east to a large meadow below, creating the effect of a natural amphitheater surrounded by timbered forest. The east end of the house is bracketed by an icehouse on the front and a dairy at the rear. A number of other outbuildings are positioned to the rear of the house, in a line running behind the dairy. Together with the house, they form a distinctive grouping. In earlier days, the land was cleared as far as the Ware River, but heavily overgrown woodland now masks that view.¹

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

POLITICS

Period of Significance

1821-1841

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Smith, Thomas

Architect/Builder

unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Airville is a fine, eastern Virginia representation of mid-level American architecture, combining elements of high-style sophistication with vernacular traditions. Built in two stages, the house's earlier section appears to date from the last half of the eighteenth century. Under the ownership of Thomas Smith (1784-1841), a prominent Gloucester County merchant and member of the Virginia House of Delegates, a three-story addition was built in the late 1830s. At that time, the eighteenth-century portion was altered to the Greek Revival Style of the newer section. The finished house, together with an array of original outbuildings, provides a notable example of work by a local craftsman who, while he appears to have been more familiar with older building styles, had access to the popular architectural pattern books of the day and worked within the dictates of a wealthy client.

JUSTIFICATION OF CRITERIA

Airville is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria B and C. It is eligible under Criterion B, because it is associated with Thomas Smith, a businessman who represented Gloucester County in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1828 until his death in 1841, and who is responsible for the significant building projects that took place at Airville between 1828 and 1840. Under Criterion C Airville is eligible, because it is a locally significant example of vernacular architecture combined with the Greek Revival Style as popularized through the architectural pattern books of the early nineteenth century.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Because the Gloucester County court records have twice been partially destroyed by fire, it is difficult to document the early historical associations for any property there. Through the sparse pre-Civil War records that still exist, however, as well as through

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bates, Mrs. Agnes. Interview, Gloucester, Virginia, January 1989.

Benjamin, Asher. The American Builder's Companion. R. P. & C. Williams, 1827. New York: Dover Reprint, Inc., 1969.

_____. The Architect, or Practical House Carpenter. Boston: L. Coffin, 1830. New York: Dover Reprint, 1988.

Bishir, Catherine W., "Jacob W. Holt, An American Builder," Winterthur Portfolio, Vol. 16, No. 1. Winterthur, Delaware: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Spring 1981.

Bullock, Marshall, Architectural Historian. Analysis and interviews: 13 April, 25 May, 12 June 1990. Airville, Gloucester County, Virginia.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

VA Dept. of Historic Resources
221 Governor St., Richmond, VA 23219

10. Geographical Data

Acres of property 45.4 acres

UTM References

A 18 | 36.7 | 10.0 | 4.1 | 3.8 | 6.8 | 0
Zone Easting Northing

B 18 | 36.6 | 9.7 | 4.1 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 0
Zone Easting Northing

C 18 | 36.6 | 5.6 | 4.1 | 3.8 | 5.8 | 0

D 18 | 36.6 | 7.4 | 4.1 | 3.8 | 8.6 | 0

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is delineated by the polygon whose vertices are marked by the following UTM reference points:

- A: 18/367100/4138680
- B: 18/366970/4138390
- C: 18/366560/4138580
- D: 18/366740/4138860

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes that portion of the parcel historically associated with the property that retains its historic integrity.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Nancy Carter Crump
organization _____ date 25 August 1990
street & number 275 High Street telephone 804-861-2639
city or town Petersburg state VA zip code 23803

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The three-bay, 2 1/2-story, nineteenth-century section and the three-bay, 1 1/2-story, eighteenth-century section of the house together measure 118.3' long x 24.2' deep and are of frame construction covered with beaded weatherboards set on a raised basement of brick laid in Flemish bond. The 44'-long eighteenth-century section contains three bays with a center double door flanked by shuttered windows. The gambrel roof is pierced in front and back by three pedimented dormers; their trim matches those in the 1830s addition. An examination of the roof structure indicates that the original roof was more than likely a gable form that was changed to the gambrel at the time of the addition. This may have been done to allow enough headroom to connect the two second-floor levels.² In fact, it appears that only the form of the eighteenth-century structure with the foundation and chimneys survives, as all exterior and interior trim matches that of the 1830s addition.³ Two brick interior-end chimneys provide heat. At the time of the 1830s addition, the west chimney stack of the original house was taken down below the roof line, and its flues were connected to the new adjoining chimney of the addition.⁴ All three exterior-chimney caps were then matched with identical granite coping.⁵ A simple stoop with a plain wooden railing provides access to this section of the house which was designed in a central-passage, single-pile plan typical of the period. Remnants of the central passage and a small winder stair remain. In the 1960s a small back porch was removed, and that entrance to the house was closed off. The door was replaced with a window, and part of the passage was incorporated to enlarge an already-existing half-bath on the first floor.

Between 1836 and 1840, both the interior and the exterior of the original house were retrimmed to match the three-bay, 2 1/2-story addition built on the west side. At this time, the first-floor plan of the old house was changed with a transverse hall running across the front of the house created by partitioning the southern ends of the two main rooms. The roof of the addition is gabled, again pierced with three pedimented dormers on front and rear. A unique feature of the dormers on both sections is the decorative detail of false fanlights in the pediments. Carved-wood tracery is applied to a flush wooden surface with the "panes" indicated by black paint. The original house has an interior-end brick chimney on the west, while the east chimney adjoins the eighteenth-century stack where the older flues were tied into the new stack. The 1836-1840 addition, 58' long, copies the central-passage, single-pile plan of the earlier section.

The focal point of the 1836-1840 section of the house's main facade is a nineteenth-century stone-floored, one-story porch that rises above a cross-vaulted brick foundation. Granite steps are flanked by decorative iron railings. Letters written in 1839 by Thomas Cocks (or Cooks) of New York document the purchase of these steps and provide details for their placement. Cocks included a sketch for Smith "so that you may put the work together without any trouble what ever as I shall . . . show ware [sic] Every Stone must be placed."⁶ Wooden Ionic columns support a flat roof on which a balustrade continues the style of the wooden porch railing with turned and molded balusters set into top and bottom rails.

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The house is entered through ornate double doors, each divided into three panels. The two upper panels are separated from the lower one by robust reeding. A large rondelle set into the square lower panel reinforces the Greek-Revival style of the corner blocks of window and door moldings. The doors are framed by sidelights and by a traceried fanlight and highlighted by large beading on the door and sidelight moldings.

The ornament of the exterior and interior of both sections reflects the style of the nineteenth-century addition. While the form and plan of both sections are traditional ones, the proportions and scale of the interior moldings and mantels reflect the Greek-Revival style as popularized by the pattern books of Asher Benjamin and others. All windows are six-over-six, double-hung sash with exterior-fluted window surrounds and small corner blocks with rondelles. Louvered shutters flank all windows. Fluted molding decorates the soffit of the exterior cornice terminating in corner blocks with rondelles. The house is served by the original copper gutters and gutter boxes decorated with an applied star motif. C. F. Stone of Norfolk made them for Smith between October and December 1840.⁷

The most elaborately detailed interior space is the stair hall in the nineteenth-century section. Its oval shape and the three-story elliptical stair rising dramatically to the third floor create an elegant space well lit from windows on the second and third floors. The stair features scrolled brackets and a ramped banister supported by rectangular balusters. A half-banister set into the passage wall continues the line of the stair in place of a chair rail.

Beneath the stair is a door leading to a rear porch on the north side of the house. The elaborate detailing continues with delicate, Gothic-detailed dentils on the interior and exterior surrounds of the elliptical-arched doorway. The screened rear porch has a wood floor. In the 1940s it was enclosed as a sunroom with a half-bath, but was restored to its original function as a porch in the 1960s.

In the hall, chair rails, six-panel doors with reeding on the lock rails, and pilaster window and door surrounds topped by corner blocks with rondelles are found, as well as in all the first-floor rooms. The symmetrical-molding profiles of the window and door surrounds vary from room to room.

Nearly all the hardware in the house is original. Again, documentation provides details of when and from whom it was purchased. On 6 September 1836, Thomas Smith wrote his brother, William Patterson Smith, who was planning a trip north, and asked him to procure several of the locks. Among the items he ordered were a "brass Lock for the outer door of my House to [open] on the right, of best quality . . . 9 mortice Locks (5 left 4 right hand) for my Drawing room & other inside doors all of which are 1 3/4 in. thick - these also I want very good, & I would be very glad if you would buy them all of Pie [sic] because I would prefer his Locks to those of any other manufacturer."⁸

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A parlor now used as a music room is located to the west of the passage. A mantel of black marble is the focal point in this room. Its design of robust fluted columns supporting a plain frieze and shelf derives from Plate LI of the 1830 edition of Asher Benjamin's The Architect, or Practical House Carpenter.⁹ The ceiling features a plaster-cove cornice with fluted molding accentuated by corner blocks decorated with a stylized dogwood motif.

A second parlor to the east of the stair hall is dominated by a more ornate black marble mantel. Attenuated, fluted Ionic columns support a frieze of alternating fluted and plain panel sections. A plain cove cornice is found in this room. The ceiling height differs here, about 12" higher than ceilings in the other rooms. Perhaps Thomas Smith intended to use this room for entertaining and therefore planned a more dramatic space; there is no documentation to prove this theory, however.

Although the ornamentation on the second floor is more subdued than that on the first, the Greek-Revival details continue throughout the addition. The plan consists of a large chamber over the west parlor with two smaller bedrooms with corner chimney breasts over the east parlor. The west chamber mantel is of grey marble. Similar in style to the east parlor mantel, its plain paneled frieze is supported by Ionic columns. The cove cornice resembles that of the parlor below.

Documentation shows that the mantels were purchased in New York. In an April 1837 letter to his brother, Thomas Smith wrote, "I have an idea of getting marble mantles [sic] for my House provided they don't cost much money - There is I understand a manufactory [?] in New York that furnishes them perhaps cheaper than any other. . . . I shall want those that are quite plain - . . ." ¹⁰ By September 1839, nine marble mantels were finished and ready for shipment to Gloucester. Detailed instructions for putting them in place were provided by Stroud and Rankin of New York City. ¹¹ Five of these marble mantels were removed in the 1940s renovation, and the remnants are still stored under the front porch.

Modern bathrooms were partitioned from the landing in the 1940s and remodeled in the 1960s; at this time a door from the landing to the roof of the front porch was replaced by a double window.

The two smaller rooms are simply designed with plain door and window moldings accentuated by the same rondelle blocks found elsewhere in the house. The southwest bedroom acts as a passage to the older house with a small staircase that descends to the half-story of the eighteenth-century section. Here two large bedchambers are separated by a hall and bathroom. The nineteenth-century decorative treatment described above continues. In the easternmost bedroom, original closet spaces with some early shelving flank a large fireplace with one of Thomas Smith's nine marble mantels still in place. Two large bedrooms and a bath occupy the third floor of the nineteenth-century addition.

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At some point, possibly during the time the nineteenth-century section was added to the house, the older section's first floor was altered. To facilitate interior access to the addition, a passage running east-west across the front of the eighteenth-century house was carved out of the existing first-floor rooms. More than likely, an interior stairway which leads to the cellar below was added here at the same time.

Airville has undergone extensive renovation at least three times in the years since the 1840 addition was built. A 16.3' long sunporch, since converted into a kitchen and breakfast room, was added to the east end of the house sometime in the 1920s. Siding and trim were milled to match the rest of the house.

In 1940 when Mr. and Mrs. Chandler Bates purchased the property, they instituted several changes, some of which have already been discussed above.¹² In the eighteenth-century section of the house, for instance, they removed the 1840 partition in the east room which had formed part of the transverse hall. The fireplace opening was closed and the mantel was removed. The room became a dining room. The rear porch of the addition was enclosed and included a half-bath; a second half-bath was added next to the rear door of the eighteenth-century section. In all but the west and east bedrooms, the fireplaces were closed and mantels removed. The nineteenth-century attic space was finished with two bedrooms and a full bath. Quarter fanlights were cut into the gables to admit light.

In the 1960s the modernization continued when the property was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. William Grover.¹³ Bathrooms were remodeled on the second and third floors. The half-bath that had been built on the nineteenth-century rear porch was removed, and the porch itself was reopened and screened. The back porch was removed from the eighteenth-century section of the house. That entry was closed; the half-bath beside it was then enlarged as previously described.

At this time, the eighteenth-century cellar was extensively remodeled to create a family room and laundry and storage space. The nineteenth-century cellar space remains basically undisturbed with large batten doors with enormous wrought-iron strap hinges, probably made on the plantation. Large fanlights were added to enclose the vaulted space beneath the front porch.

Airville possesses an outstanding collection of outbuildings, most of which seem to date from the building program Thomas Smith initiated immediately after buying the plantation.¹⁴ The buildings are aligned behind the dwelling house on the north side (see sketch map). Most notable are the round icehouse and dairy, both constructed of brick covered with plaster. Large amounts of brick were ordered from James Longest of King and Queen County between 1828 and 1831; most of them no doubt were used to construct these two buildings.¹⁵ Conical, wood-shingled roofs cover both buildings. The icehouse, now used as a pool house, has a six-over-six, double-hung sash window which replaced the small batten door seen in early photographs. The dairy is used currently for storage, although

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the slightly sunken floor, water trough, and vents under the eaves of the roof remain. A ball finial perched on top of the conical roof adds a decorative touch.

James Longest, mentioned above, is responsible for the construction of at least one of the outbuildings--the square, frame smokehouse set on brick piers and sheathed with beaded weatherboards.¹⁶ Its wood-shingled, pyramidal roof is supported by a king-post truss system.

Next to it is a small storage building or lumber house of frame construction covered with beaded weatherboards and set on a brick foundation. Strap hinges support the sheathed main door; a second, smaller door provides access to the loft. Six-over-six, double-hung sash windows pierce the rear and one side of this building which has been modernized.

The oldest outbuilding, which may date to the eighteenth century, is situated between the dairy and the smokehouse. It is frame covered with beaded weatherboards, and its wood-shingled roof is pierced by a single shed dormer on both front and rear. A large, brick, exterior-end chimney laid in common bond is a distinctive feature of this building. A six-panel door opens into a single room with a finished loft above. While an elderly member of the Harwood family remembers it being used as an office, the building may have served other purposes during its history.¹⁷ It has been remodeled into an apartment by the current owners.

With the exception of the icehouse which stands alone at the southwest crest of the hill, the outbuildings are placed in a line behind the dairy, creating a plantation street. The street may have led to other outbuildings that no longer exist, including barns, granaries, stables, and slave quarters.¹⁸

Two noncontributing buildings of frame construction possess the style and detailing of the other outbuildings. A gabled barn with a tin roof is covered with plain weatherboarding. Near it a new carriage house with a second-floor apartment is covered with beaded weatherboarding. It has a shingled gambrel roof. Both buildings are located to the rear of the early outbuildings.

ENDNOTES

¹ October 1841 Sale Advertisement. "The situation of the Dwelling is one of the most beautiful in Eastern Virginia, commanding a very extensive water prospect, embracing Mobjac [sic] and Chesapeake Bays and their tributary streams." William Patterson Smith Papers, 1791-1943. Perkins Library Manuscripts Department, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

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² Willie Graham. Interview and Analysis on 25 May 1990 at Airville, Gloucester County, Virginia.

³ Ibid. Also Marshall Bullock, 13 April and 25 May 1990 at Airville, Gloucester County, Virginia.

⁴ Ibid. Graham and Bullock.

⁵ Ibid. Graham and Bullock. Also Smith Papers. Letters of 25 September, 12 November, and 16 November 1839 from Thomas Cocks (or Cooks) to Thomas Smith provided instructions for placing the coping.

⁶ Smith Papers. Thomas Cocks to Thomas Smith, 25 September 1839.

⁷ Ibid. C. F. Stone to Thomas Smith, 24 October 1840: "the way we generally do them, we have a strip of wood about 3 inch [sic] wide and 1 inch thick, after the Copper is laid on the Portico, we raise the edge of the Copper, and nail the strip under, and then lay the Copper over the strip which forms the gutter all round. . . . I would like to know how large you would like to have the conductors for the Portico. I should think 2 inches in Diameter, the Heads for the conductor would look much better than pipes. I will make them out of Copper and Gild [sic] and Smolt, and the year on them in Gilt. . . . it will be quite an improvement to the looks of the house . . ."; a letter and itemized bill from Stone to Smith on 11 December 1840 gives the total cost of gutter work for the house as \$25.45.

⁸ Ibid. 6 September 1836, Thomas Smith to William Patterson Smith. The company to which Smith refers was W. Pye Patent Lock Manufacturers of Philadelphia.

⁹ Asher Benjamin, The Architect, or Practical House Carpenter. Boston: L. Coffin, 1830. Plate LI facing page 75.

¹⁰ Smith Papers. Thomas Smith to William Patterson Smith, 5 April 1837.

¹¹ Ibid. Stroud & Rankin to Thomas Smith, 20 September and 16 November 1839. The New York City Directory for 1841-1842 lists Stroud & Rankin as "Marble Cutters," located at 339 Greenwich Lane.

¹² William C. Taylor, Architect. "Airville Renovation, Gloucester County, for Mr. & Mrs. Chandler Bates," about 1940-1952 (undated). Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia. NOTE: Information regarding 1940s changes are taken from these plans.

¹³ Mr. & Mrs. William R. Grover. Interview, January 1989, Gloucester, Virginia.

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14 Smith Papers. Thomas Smith took possession of Airville in January 1828. By May of that year, he had placed orders for window glass and putty.

15 Ibid. 27 November 1828 agreement between James Longest and Thomas Smith. Also orders dated from October 1829 through 20 July 1831.

16 Ibid. Longest to Smith, 10 December 1831.

17 William A. Robins III. Interview, April 1989 at Airville.

18 Smith Papers. October 1841 Sale advertisement.

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various family records and local traditions, Airville's history and its major owners can be traced, even though there are gaps in its chronology into the early nineteenth century.

The Fry-Jefferson map of 1755 shows a large tract of Gloucester County land as belonging to a member of the Throckmorton family.¹ Local tradition holds that the owner of the tract was Warner Throckmorton and credits him with building the older section of the manor house located on the portion of the tract now known as Airville. Unfortunately, this cannot be verified. That section of the house apparently dates to the last half of the eighteenth century and may in fact have been built by a later owner, possibly one of the John Dixons who owned the plantation.

It appears that the entire tract was acquired sometime during the third quarter of the eighteenth century by the Reverend John Dixon (d. 1777). Dixon was rector of Kingston Parish, then part of Gloucester County, from 1750 until 1770 when he became Professor of Divinity at the College of William and Mary. He resigned that position in 1777 shortly before his death.²

The property was then inherited by his son, John Dixon, Jr. (died in 1788) who held office in the county, first as justice of the peace and then as sheriff.³ At his death, the property, along with the many debts accumulated by Dixon, passed to his eldest son, who was also named John Dixon (1788-1830).⁴ He struggled for years to pay the debts owed by the estate. By 1827, however, economic circumstances forced the sale of Airville to Thomas Smith, a wealthy merchant to whom the Dixons had long been indebted.⁵

Thomas Smith (1784-1841) was well known in Virginia. Educated at the College of William and Mary, he served as a Gloucester County member of the Virginia House of Delegates from 1828 to 1830 and again from 1831 until his death in April 1841. With his brother, William Patterson Smith, he ran a successful mercantile business and a grain trade throughout the Chesapeake area with connections in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, London, and the West Indies. The Smiths were men of broad commercial interests, speculating in land investments in Texas, Arkansas, and what is now West Virginia; internal improvements in Virginia and North Carolina; stocks and bonds; banks; property and fire insurance; and agricultural improvements in machinery, fertilizers, and farming methods.⁶

When Thomas Smith took possession of Airville in January 1828, he began a major building campaign starting with the outbuildings and continuing until the completion of the house shortly before his death. By May 1828 Smith was placing orders for building material which included glass, putty, and planking of varying sizes.⁷ In November he contracted with James Longest of King and Queen County for "One Hundred Thousand all hard & good Bricks by actual count."⁸ Exact dimensions were stipulated, and the completed order was to be delivered to Smith by the following August "at his farm called Airville."⁹

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Smith's association with Longest continued for several years. It appears that Longest built at least one of the outbuildings; a "saw house" is mentioned in a December 1831 letter from him to Smith.¹⁰ Over the next several years, construction of other outbuildings, as well as fencing of the property, took place.¹¹

During these years he also commenced extensive farming operations. These included raising barley, oats, corn, and other crops, and the accumulation of stock that included "best blooded" horses, cattle, sheep, and hogs.¹²

By September 1836 Smith had begun on the dwelling house itself. Sandwiched between his state legislative duties as a delegate from Gloucester County and his busy mercantile operations, the project, which included the building of a three-story addition and an extensive remodeling of the original section, took better than four years. Smith's personal papers document the work, as well as the companies and/or manufacturers with whom he dealt. Orders for everything from butt hinges to copper gutters and marble mantelpieces indicate the level of detail Smith devoted to its construction.¹³ By December 1840 the house was all but completed.

Unfortunately, Thomas Smith did not live to enjoy the improvements he had made at Airville. On 13 April 1841 following a short illness, he died intestate.¹⁴ His brother and business partner, William Patterson Smith, qualified as executor of the estate, and by October 1841 Thomas Smith's extensive holdings were advertised for public sale.¹⁵ Airville was described as "well worth the attention of those disposed to invest in Real Estate," offering inducements "rarely to be met with. It has a new . . . Dwelling House of ample dimensions, finished in the neatest manner, and of the very best materials - all the rooms above and below are fitted up with handsome Marble Mantles [sic], and a circular Staircase of Mahogany, winding from the basement story to the Garret. [The plantation] has . . . all the necessary out houses, consisting of Barns, Stables, Granaries, Icehouse, Dairy, & & nearly all new."¹⁶

John Tabb Catlett was the successful buyer, and he was in possession of Airville by February 1842.¹⁷ A local tradition holds that Catlett lost the property through a wager with Thomas S. Harwood. Harwood certainly owned it by 1848, although it cannot be documented whether he acquired it through a direct purchase from Catlett or by the satisfaction of the alleged wager. Documents indicate that there were legal difficulties between the two men that may account for Harwood's acquisition of the plantation.¹⁸

Under Harwood family ownership, Airville was a working farm with crops of wheat and other grains being sold through various markets in Norfolk and Baltimore.¹⁹ Thomas S. Harwood and his descendants, who later divided the property, owned Airville until 1926 at which time it was sold out of the family. Since that time, some nine other families have owned it; the boundaries have been reduced further over the years through various land transactions.

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In 1987 Airville was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. J. Donald Shenk, who have newly renovated the house and outbuildings.

ENDNOTES

¹ Fry-Jefferson Map, 1755.

² Berna L. Heyman, "John Dixon, Junior." Gloucester, Virginia: Bulletin of the Gloucester Historical Society in Virginia. Vol. 1, No. 7, April 1982, pp. 10-11.

³ Ibid, pp. 11-12.

⁴ John Dixon Papers. Manuscripts, College of William and Mary. Wills for both Reverend John and John Dixon, Jr., are in this collection.

⁵ Ibid. Also Harwood Family Papers, 1774-1906, Sec. 2: Muniments. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; also William Patterson Smith Papers, Perkins Library Archives, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

⁶ Smith Papers.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. Agreement of 27 November 1828 between Smith and Longest.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. Longest to Smith 10 December 1831.

¹¹ Ibid. William Patterson Smith to Thomas Smith 23 February 1833. "I rode over to Air Ville [sic] yesterday . . . Mr. Williams is about finishing the fence upon the road, commencing at the yard gate, & terminating at the division between yourself & Mr. Perrin, & a most excellent fence it is . . ."

¹² Ibid. Sale advertisement, October 1841.

¹³ Ibid.

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14 P. E. Tabb in Richmond to William Patterson Smith, 26 April 1841: "I have inquired . . . with whom your Brother [Thomas Smith] was intimate in this City, and none . . . have any knowledge, whatever, of his having made a will . . ." Also, Faculty/Alumni File, College of William and Mary Archives; also John F. Dorman, editor, The Virginia Genealogist, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 65-66. Washington, D.C., 1965.

15 Smith Family Papers. Phillip Winslow in Cleveland, Ohio, to William Patterson Smith, 18 October 1841: "I have . . . seen your advertisement in the National Intelligencer of Gloucester Lands to be sold on the first of November belonging to the Estate of the late Col. Thomas Smith one Farm you call Airvill [sic] containing 679-acres . . ." Other Smith papers for this time period discuss the estate and its sale.

16 Ibid. Sale Advertisement, October 1841.

17 Ibid. 1843 (no specific date) document regarding the collection of bonds due Thomas Smith's estate mentions "interest from 16 Feb [sic] last [1842] . . . due by John T. Catlett for his purchase of . . . Air-ville [sic] . . ."

18 Robins Family Papers, 1784-1939. Manuscripts, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

19 Harwood Family Papers.

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Section number 9 Page 1

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- Heyman, Berna L. "John Dixon, Junior. Gloucester, Virginia: Bulletin of the Gloucester Historical Society in Virginia. Vol. 1, No. 7, April 1982.
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Section number 9 Page 2

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Sanders, VanBibber, "Airville" Real Estate brochure. New York, New York: Property Clearing Association, Inc., 1937.

Shurtleff, Arthur A. "Airville, A.F. Counts, Gloucester County, Virginia," Site Plan, 1929. Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.

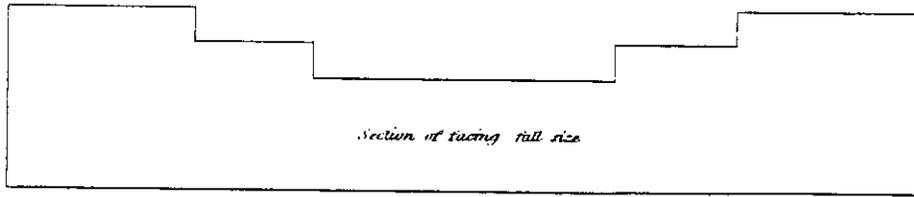
Smith & Brother, Norfolk Agents for Franklin Fire Insurance Company of Philadelphia. Fire Insurance Policies for Airville, 1848, etc. In Robins Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

Smith, William Patterson. Papers, 1791-1943. Manuscripts Department, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

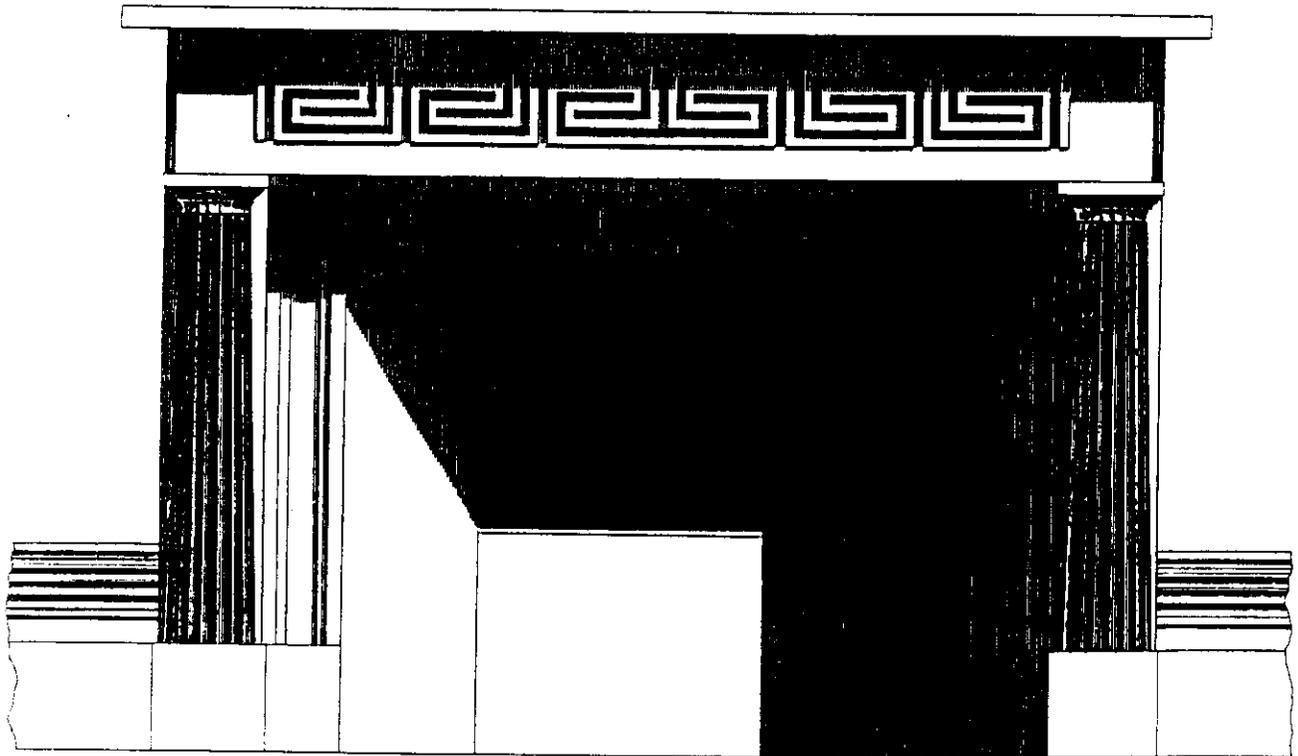
Stubbs, Wm. C., Jr. (39.1 St 8), Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

Taylor, Wickham C., Architect. "Airville Renovation, Gloucester County, for Mr. & Mrs. Chandler Bates," about 1940-1952 (undated). Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.

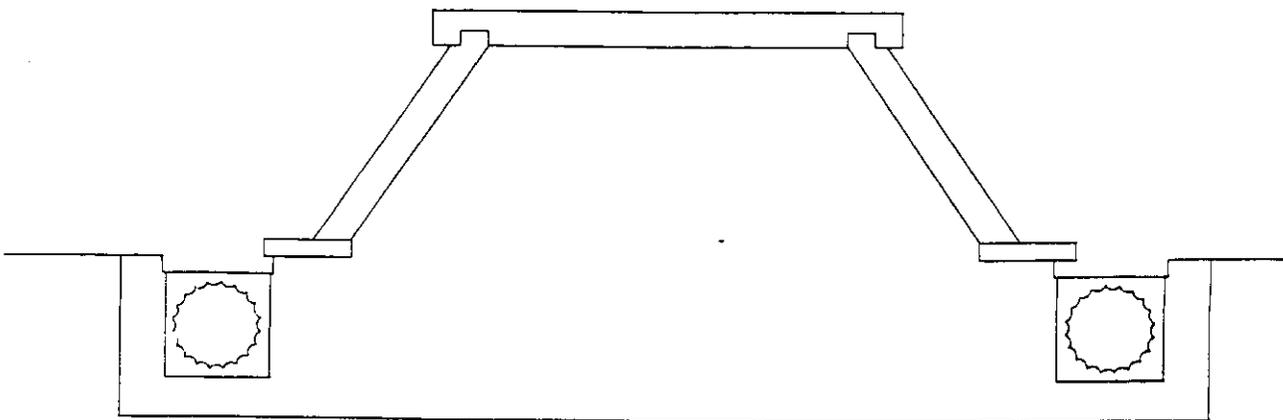
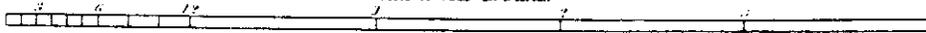
CHIMNEY PIECE.

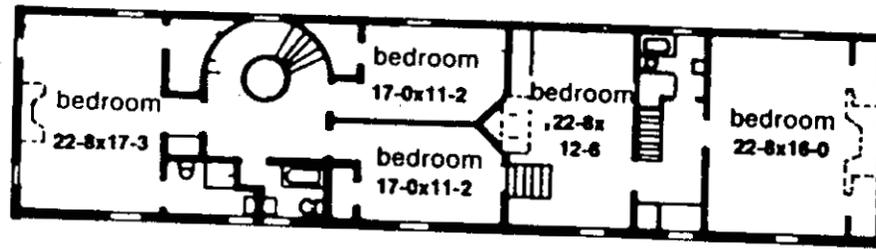
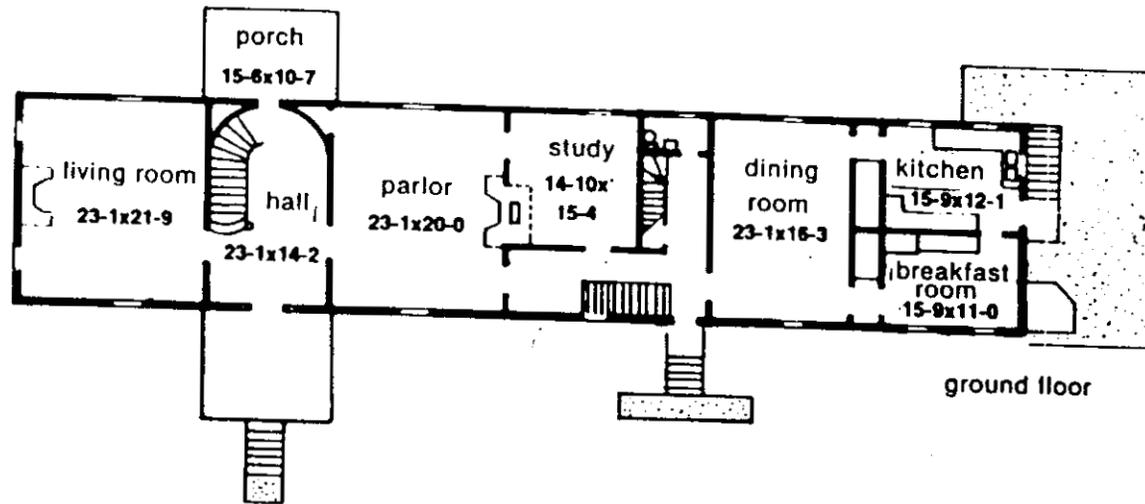


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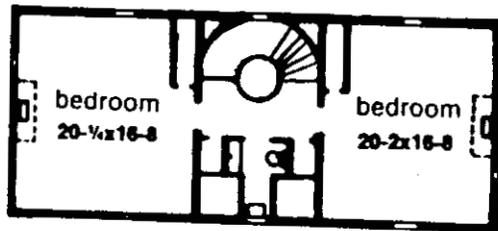


Scale of feet & inches





second floor



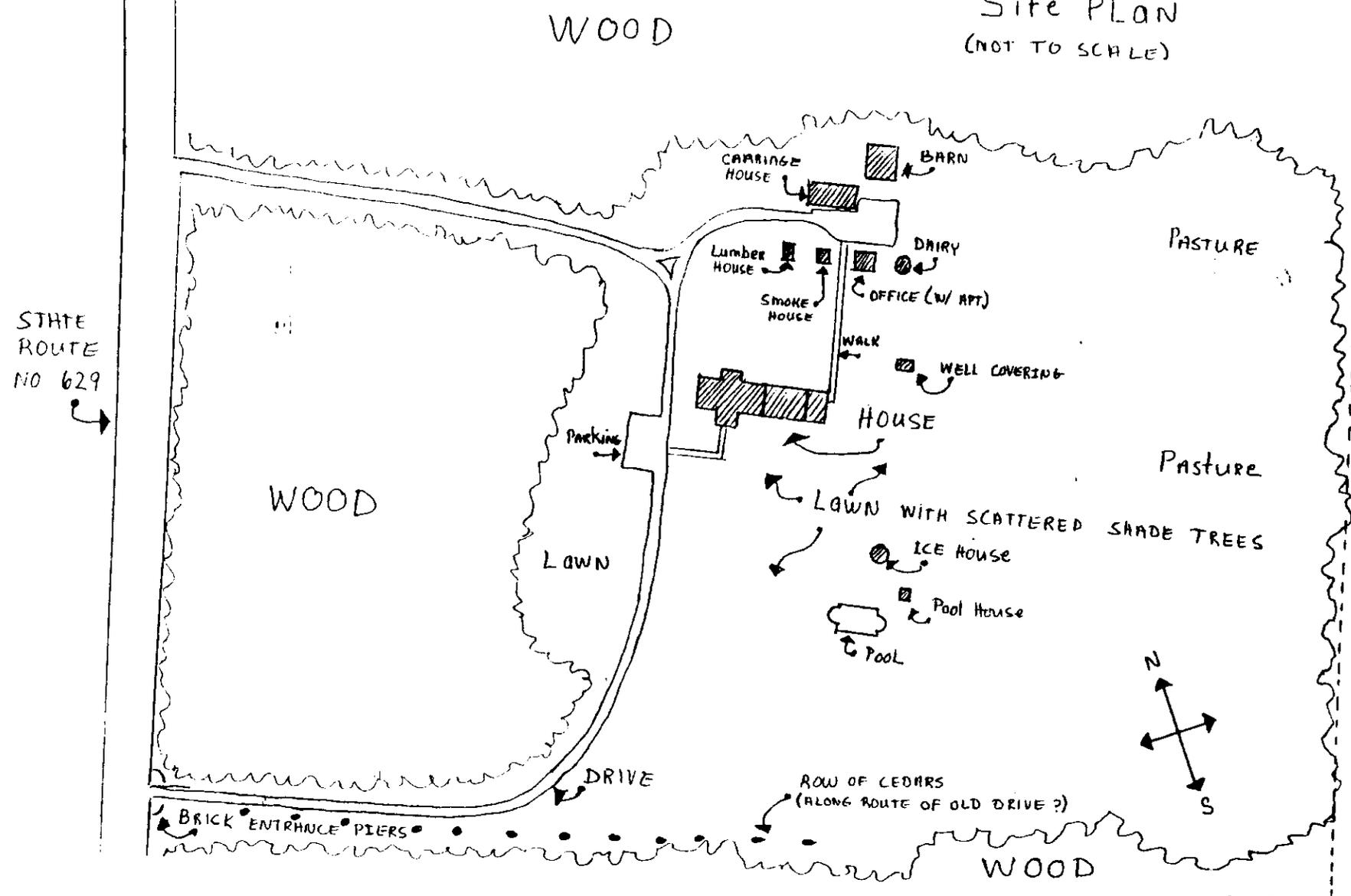
third floor



basement

Airville Floor Plans

Airville Site PLAN (NOT TO SCALE)



STATE
ROUTE
NO 629

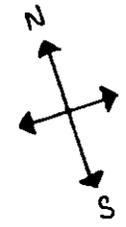
WOOD

WOOD

WOOD

PASTURE

PASTURE



BRICK ENTRANCE PIERS

DRIVE

LAWN

ROW OF CEDARS
(ALONG ROUTE OF OLD DRIVE ?)

HOUSE

LAWN WITH SCATTERED SHADE TREES

ICE HOUSE

Pool House

POOL

WALK

WELL COVERING

OFFICE (W/ APT)

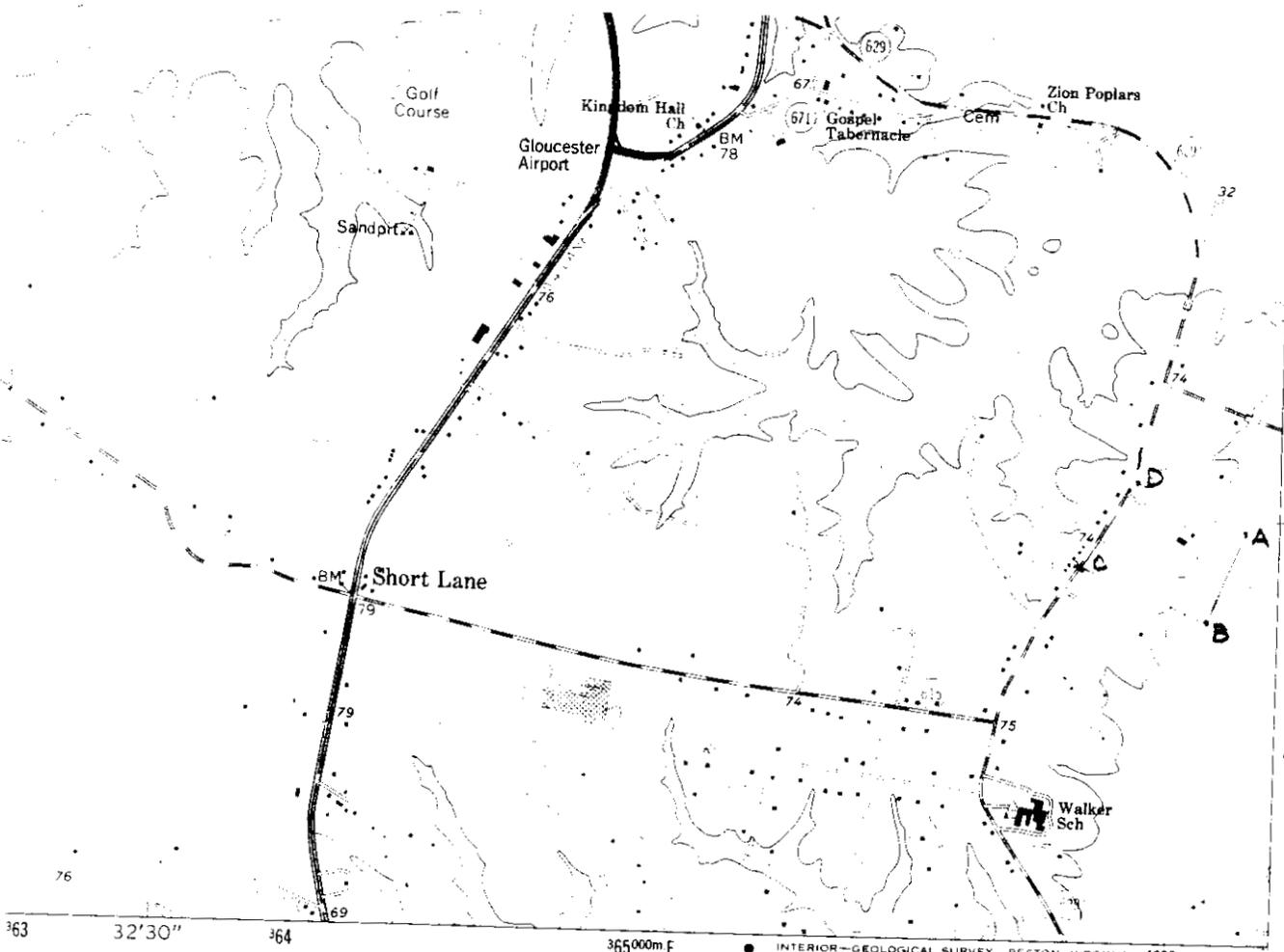
DAIRY

Lumber HOUSE

SMOKE HOUSE

CARRIAGE HOUSE

BARN

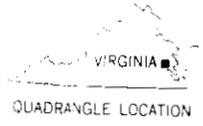


AIRVILLE
GLOUCESTER C
 UTM REFERENCE
 4139 A: 18|367100|4
 B: 18|366970|4
 C: 18|366560|4
 D: 18|366740|4

1 MILE
 ET

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty	—————	Light-duty	-----
Medium-duty	—————	Unimproved dirt	- - - - -
	U. S. Route		State Route



GLOUCESTER, VA.

37076-D5-TF-024

1965
 PHOTOREVISED 1986
 DMA 5658 I NE—SERIES V834

(ACHILLES)
 5758 IV SW

Revisions shown in purple compiled in cooperation with Commonwealth of Virginia agencies from aerial photographs taken 1982 and other source data. This information not field checked. Map edited 1986